

A Focus on Continuous Improvement of Research Advisors at

the University of Wisconsin - Stout

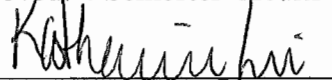
by

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**ABSTRACT**

Organizational development initiatives often involve continuous improvement, but sometimes leave the organization to question, “What is continuous improvement?” When continuous improvement is used with a working definition and within a model, an organization is more apt to succeed. The Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) is a program developed by The Higher Learning Commission to help universities succeed with continuous improvement. The University of Wisconsin – Stout (UW-Stout) is one of several universities to have joined the AQIP. Following *The Training Curriculum Model – Fitting the Pieces Together to Build a Strong Organization*, this paper uses the AQIP Categories to study continuous improvement of the role of graduate research advisors to determine if additional faculty training will aid in helping students learn.

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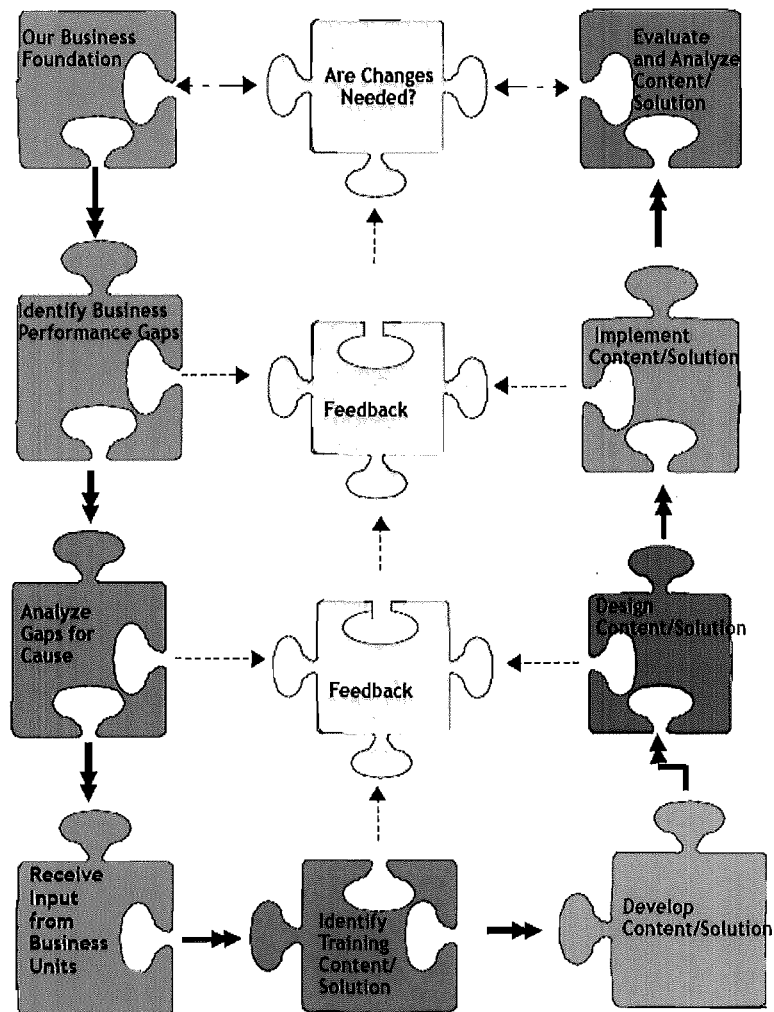
## Chapter I: Introduction

Organizations looking for success often focus on quality, turning to programs such as Total Quality Management and Continuous Improvement as a path towards quality achievement. Sometimes, organizations hand over the project of implementing quality to their training department; which, in fact, is a great place to start. Training and Development Specialists use instructional design models that incorporate continuous improvement in order “to gain information on how to improve future training programs” (Johnson, 2009). Colleges and universities are among the organizations looking for continuous improvement. In 2009, the researcher, a training and development graduate student, was asked to create training for graduate research advisors at the University of Wisconsin – Stout. Using the model, “The Training Curriculum Model – Fitting the Pieces Together to Build a Strong Organization (see Figure 1.),” the researcher began by focusing on the university's foundation. Finding some key aspects in place and others being developed, such as a research advisor handbook, the researcher concluded that the place to start on the curriculum model was with evaluation to find if changes were needed to improve the organization's foundation. Training is not always the answer, and, in order to initiate instructional design, a performance gap must be present. In the case of the graduate research advisors, there was not a known performance gap. Continuous improvement does not need a performance gap in order to be initiated. Therefore, this research focuses on evaluation of research advisors at the University of Wisconsin – Stout to see if continuous improvement will bring about higher quality in student development, improved graduate faculty performance, and a higher quality academic program.

Figure 1. Training curriculum model – fitting the pieces together to build a strong organization.

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**Training Curriculum Model - Fitting The Pieces Together To Build A Strong Organization**



The University of Wisconsin – Stout, located in Menomonie, Wisconsin, offers degree programs in undergraduate and graduate studies. A total of 8,811 students attend the university with the majority of students working towards a bachelors degree and 1,045



students, or 12% of the student population, enrolled in a graduate program (UW-Stout, 2008a). The graduate program has been a key part of the institution since 1948 (UW-Stout, 2007b, p. 2) and offers 17 masters degree programs and 2 specialist programs. The graduate degree programs are dispersed in three of the four colleges.

The organizational structure of the University of Wisconsin – Stout is made up of departments, colleges, schools, services, and facilities with the Chancellor overseeing the entire organization (UW-Stout, 2008b). The Graduate School at the University of Wisconsin – Stout is part of the organizational structure as it is a unit of the Academic and Student Affairs Division. The Graduate School ensures that graduate programs, graduate faculty, and graduate students adhere to the policies set by the University of Wisconsin – Stout.

The University of Wisconsin – Stout employs graduate faculty, in the four colleges and the School of Education, that are required to teach, serve, and conduct research (UW-Stout, 2004). An additional duty of the graduate faculty is to advise students, specifically during the student's required research. In other words, graduate faculty are required to take on the role of advisor. Research advisors are assigned the following expectations:

1. Must exert effort to establish a climate of mutual respect and reciprocal communication.
2. Must have a meeting with the student to approve the design of the study and the paper prior to its initiation, and to discuss advisement expectations of the student.
3. Must complete the appropriate certification process which relates to the use of human subjects in research. (REV 9/01)

4. Must be reasonably available for consultation in accordance with the agreed upon time frame. Note: the Graduate Student Council recommends the equivalent of one scheduled hour per week.
5. Must provide written feedback to students on drafts of the paper in accordance with the agreed upon time frame.
6. Must provide assistance with data analysis, or direction to knowledgeable sources, and should provide suggestions on how the results can be used in framing conclusions.
7. Must assist with the integration of the findings with prior research.
8. Should guide in the technical writing of the paper.
9. Must review the paper before final submission for proper format.
10. Must read the finished paper, giving final approval by signing the cover sheet, and assigning a grade. (UW-Stout Graduate School, 2009)

Graduate students at the University of Wisconsin – Stout are expected to fulfill their program's requirements which may include: attending classes, participating in coursework, and writing a research paper to fulfill graduation requirements. When research is required, the graduate student works under the advisement of a selected graduate faculty member and submits the thesis in a format set by the Graduate School following the American Psychological Association (APA) standard. The relationship between the faculty advisor and graduate student becomes an integral part of the research process and can necessitate many hours of communication between the advisor and advisee.

In summary, the relationship being focused on for this paper is the link between the Graduate School, the graduate faculty and the graduate student during a student's research.

### *Background of the Problem*

In 1996, the university found itself in disarray with a “formal vote of 'no confidence' from the faculty and staff (UW-Stout, 2007b).” The university began a process of quality improvement that included looking at the university as a system rather than individual parts. For its work, the university was awarded the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in 2001; after which, the University of Wisconsin – Stout remained committed to continuous improvement. In 2002, the University of Wisconsin – Stout joined the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) as a commitment to continuous improvement (UW-Stout, 2007b).

With AQIP, an institution demonstrates it meets accreditation standards and expectations through sequences of events that align with those ongoing activities that characterize organizations striving to improve their performance. (AQIP, 2009)

As a participant in AQIP, the University of Wisconsin – Stout defines Action Projects that are goals for the university to focus on for quality improvement (UW-Stout, 2007b). In 2002, one of the first action projects was for graduate education:

The primary goal of this project was to increase the number of graduate students enrolled at UW-Stout. This was accomplished by developing new graduate programs, increasing enrollments and retention rates in existing programs and increasing the number of courses and programs that are delivered in non-traditional formats.

Improving the quality of services provided to graduate students was also part of this action project (UW-Stout, 2007b, p. 4).

In 2004, the graduate education action project was completed and closed, and other Action Projects defined and opened. The University of Wisconsin – Stout uses the AQIP Principles

and Categories and the Baldrige model “as an overarching program, a system unifies the campus without requiring standardization across all campus units (Sorensen, Furst-Bowe, Moen, 2005, p. 5).” Every college and department is open to work towards ways of continuous improvement that coincide with Stout's mission and vision.

The Graduate School is an example how a department works on continuous improvement to meet the university's mission and vision. The 2007-2008 Graduate School's Annual Report listed the School's goals for continuous improvement that included student services, university service, UW-system service, office operations, and staff development (UW-Stout, 2008c). In 2009, the Graduate School is in the process of compiling a research advisor handbook in order to improve services.

In 2009, a graduate faculty advisor questioned if creating training, standards, and materials for graduate advisors was needed and contacted the University of Wisconsin – Stout's Training and Development students to investigate. A review of the foundation showed that a research advisor handbook could be the answer to the lack of materials; however, the role of advisor requires knowledge, skills, and abilities beyond knowing how to edit in APA style. The lack of knowledge, skills, and abilities as an advisor could lead to greater stress on the part of the graduate faculty or a decline in the relationship between the advisor and the student, as evident in previous surveys of University of Wisconsin – Stout students and faculty. A survey of graduates, both undergraduate and graduate students, from 1998 and 1996, revealed the rating for “Quality of Academic Advising” as the lowest area of satisfaction (UW-Stout, 2000). In 2004 and 2007, UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute surveyed all University of Wisconsin – Stout faculty. A comparison of the 2004 and

2007 surveys show that there was an increase in stress and a decrease in job satisfaction felt by the faculty (UW-Stout, 2008b).

### *Statement of the Problem*

The graduate faculty at the University of Wisconsin – Stout have an essential role of advising students during the student's research paper. While graduate faculty have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to teach the subjects of their field, they may lack training in areas such as advising (Preparing Future Faculty, 2008). A survey of graduate faculty using continuous improvement initiatives will determine if training is needed for the graduate faculty to improve on their role of advisor to students. The survey will also reveal if other university processes could be improved in the area of graduate advisor. If so, improving the integral relationship between advisor and advisee will improve operational efficiency.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to collect and analyze data for Category 1, Helping Students Learn, as defined by AQIP, from the graduate faculty at the University of Wisconsin – Stout. The goal is to determine if changes are needed in the graduate faculty advisor role in order to strengthen the University of Wisconsin – Stout's foundation.

### *Significance of the Study*

Successful organizations use continuous improvement to lead the way to quality. The University of Wisconsin – Stout has adapted the Academic Quality Improvement Program as a commitment to the university's continuous improvement plan that began in 1996 (UW-Stout, 2007b). In the Spring of 2009, a graduate faculty advisor questioned if training, standards, and materials for graduate advisors was needed by advisors. At the same time, the Graduate School, in its own continuous improvement process, was developing a research

advisor handbook. The data collected from the study should determine if training or process improvement is needed for advisors.

### *Assumptions of the Study*

The following are assumption of the study:

1. Graduate faculty have knowledge of the Academic Quality Improvement Program.
2. A research advisor handbook being compiled by the Graduate School will contain information pertinent to the duties and tasks of a research advisor.
3. Graduate students' needs for learning and development are heightened during their required research project.
4. Graduate faculty are interested in continuous improvement of the advisor role.
5. Graduate faculty will respond to a survey.
6. The researcher will be able to follow the Academic Quality Improvement Plan model and be able to interpret the data gathered.

### *Definition of Terms*

*5-Point Likert Scale.* A Likert Scale is a numbered scale used in surveys to collect “data on attitudes, opinions, or judgments.” (Lee and Nelson, 2006, p. 58)

*Advisor.* “A teacher responsible for advising students on academic matters.” (The Random House College Dictionary, 1988, p. 21)

*Action Projects.* “Action Projects strengthen an organization’s commitment to continuous improvement; educate and motivate faculty, staff, and administrators; and improve systems and processes that lead to success in achieving organizational goals.” (AQIP, 2007, p. 8)

*Continuous Improvement.* “CI is a purposeful and explicit set of principles, mechanisms and activities within an organization adopted to generate ongoing, systematic and cumulative improvement in deliverables, operating procedures and systems. CI contributes positively to the organization’s target achievement.” (Lillrank, Shani, and Lindberg, 2001, p. 43)

*Decision Table.* “A decision table is a handy tool to assist the researcher in formulating the decision.” (Lee and Nelson, 2006, p. 154)

*Knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs).* A term used in the world of training that defines what an employee knows and can do.

*Organizational Development.* “Organization development is a long-term effort, led and supported by top management, to improve an organization’s visioning, empowerment, learning and problems resolving processes, through an ongoing, collaboration management of organization culture- with special emphasis on the culture of intact work teams and other team configurations –using the consultant facilitator role and the theory and technology of applied behavioral science including action research.” (French and Bell, 1999)

*Quantitative Analysis.* “The analysis of a substance to determine the amounts and proportions of its constituents.” (The Random House College Dictionary, 1988, p. 1080)

*Thesis.* “A monograph embodying original research, esp. one presented by a candidate for a master's degree.” (The Random House College Dictionary, 1988, p. 1364).

*Total Quality Management (TQM).* A management system “based on three principles: customer focus, continuous improvement and teamwork.” (Lillrank, Shani, and Lindberg, 2001, p. 42)

### *Limitations of the Study*

The following are limitations to the study:

1. The researcher's knowledge of AQIP and continuous improvement is limited to less than two years of graduate coursework.
2. The researcher's knowledge of terminology used by faculty at the University of Wisconsin – Stout.
3. The researcher's knowledge of the Graduate School.
4. There is a limited amount of time to collect data from the graduate faculty as the semester is already past the midpoint.
5. The Graduate School plays a significant role in administration, however the Graduate School staff will not be surveyed.
6. Graduate students play a significant role in the advisor/advisee relationship, but will not be surveyed.

### *Methodology*

The researcher will be conducting an on-line survey of the 183 graduate faculty at the University of Wisconsin – Stout that have been approved by the Graduate School as research advisors. The 21 survey questions will be formatted using questions defined through the Academic Quality Improvement Plan, Category One, and using a 5-point Likert Scale to collect quantitative data. The data will be interpreted with the decision table shown in Appendix A.



## Chapter II: Literature Review

### *Training and Development*

The field of Training and Development is usually thought of by laymen as people that can stand up and teach; yet, the field is much more powerful than that. Training and development is a way of linking training to an organization's needs in order to help the organization succeed, and even become a high performance organization. Training and development specialists use models for a guide in their instructional design. The most common model is the Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate model called ADDIE. Whichever model is used, the evaluation element is a key to the focus on continuous improvement of the organization.

### *Continuous Improvement*

Continuous Improvement (CI) emerged in the 1990's as a system for quality improvement and organizational development (Lillrank, Shani, and Lindberg, 2001). As such, many organizations involved in organizational development took on some form of continuous improvement. The term alone is innocuous enough, seemingly to mean a way of continually improving and organization. Organizations that begin continuous improvement initiatives using this simple interpretation, find that more processes are added to the organization, and at times, making things more complex and the organization suffers. Continuous Improvement does not in itself mean adding more rules and regulations to increase quality, but rather can be the opposite. Continuous Improvement is a way to look at the organization to improve quality by eliminating any wasteful processes or procedures. Thus, it is important that an organization that wants to succeed with Continuous Improvement initiatives must understand its true definition:

“CI is a purposeful and explicit set of principles, mechanisms and activities within an organization adopted to generate ongoing, systematic and cumulative improvement in deliverables, operating procedures and systems. CI contributes positively to the organization’s target achievement (Lillrank, Shani, and Lindberg, 2001, p. 43).”

One way to succeed with Continuous Improvement is to pair it with programs that help an organization in the implementation, such as the Baldrige model or the Academic Quality Improvement Program.

#### *Quality and the Malcolm Baldrige Award*

Quality, as defined by The Random House College Dictionary as “high grade, great excellence (1988, p.1080),” is what most consumers look for in their products. Beginning in the 1980's, the Ford Motor Company used the slogan “Quality is Job 1” to capture consumer interest and drive the company forward in capturing the automobile market (Paton, 2001). Ford was not alone; many businesses in the 1980's began to use quality as a driving force for profits through programs such as Continuous Improvement (CI) and Total Quality Management (TQM). The underlying factor in the quality movement of CI and TQM was that an organization ran as a system and not individual units or silos.

In 1987, the United States government established the Malcolm Baldrige Award into law to recognize the quality achievements of U.S. organizations. In 1999, the Malcolm Baldrige Award was extended to include the eligibility of health care and education organizations (Diamondstone, 2000). Today, the Malcolm Baldrige Award is a prestigious award and honor for an organization to hold that displays the organization's commitment to quality.

In 2001, the University of Wisconsin – Stout was the first post-secondary institution to be awarded the Malcolm Baldrige Award (Furst-Bowe and Bauer, 2007). While most often thought of in consumer products, quality has become a slow, but strong initiative at universities. Slow in the fact that universities have been long established; innovation and transformation were not driving forces for universities, rather tradition and status quo was what was followed (Furst-Bowe and Bauer, 2007). As universities are drawn towards quality, the consumer forces that push the markets of business and industry to quality are not the same forces that push universities. As in the case of the University of Wisconsin – Stout, it took a strong force of “no-confidence” (UW-Stout, 2007b, p. 2) from the faculty and staff to begin the drive for quality. In 2002, the University of Wisconsin – Stout joined the Academic Quality Improvement Program to continue its journey and commitment to quality (UW-Stout, 2007b).

#### *Academic Quality Improvement Program*

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is an independent corporation founded in 1895 that accredits degree-granting educational institutions that are located in the North Central Region of the United States (The Higher Learning Commission, n.d.). The HLC is grounded in quality as can be attested by its mission statement: “Serving the common good by assuring and advancing the quality of higher learning. (The Higher Learning Commission, n.d., p. 2).” Institutions, such as the University of Wisconsin – Stout, value accreditation by the HLC as it “provides assurance to the public, in particular to prospective students, that an organization has been found to meet the agency’s clearly stated requirements and criteria and that there are reasonable grounds for believing that it will continue to meet them (HLC, n.d., p. 10).”

To achieve accreditation, educational institutions must demonstrate that the institution meets the five criteria established by the HLC (n.d.):

1. Criterion One: Mission and Integrity.
2. Criterion Two: Preparing for the Future.
3. Criterion Three: Student Learning and Effective Teaching.
4. Criterion Four: Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge.
5. Criterion Five: Engagement and Service (pp. 5-7).

The process for accreditation is a time consuming and vigorous process which must be maintained by the institution to remain accredited.

In 1999, the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) was established through the HLC as an alternative process for universities to maintain accreditation with the commission (AQIP, 2007). AQIP is a program that draws on quality improvement initiatives such Total Quality Management and Continuous Improvement. Most importantly, AQIP looks at a university as a system and not as individual colleges or departments. Institutions that want to implement AQIP to maintain HLC accreditation must already be in the process of quality improvement and innovation and not grounded in the traditional status quo of being led exclusively by the head of the school.

AQIP's goal is to infuse the principles and benefits of continuous improvement into the culture of colleges and universities in order to assure and advance the quality of higher education (AQIP, 2007).

AQIP still depends on the five criteria set by the HLC for accreditation, but goes beyond the generality of the criteria and has established Principles and Categories that give institutions

guidance on how to maintain accreditation. An institution gets started by using the AQIP's

Principles of High Performance Organizations (2007) for guidance:

1. A mission and vision that focus on serving students' and other stakeholders' needs
2. Broad-based faculty, staff, and administrative involvement
3. Leaders and leadership systems that support a quality culture
4. A learning-centered environment Respect for people and willingness to invest in them
5. Collaboration and a shared institutional focus
6. Agility, flexibility, and responsiveness to changing needs and conditions
7. Planning for innovation and improvement
8. Fact-based information-gathering and thinking to support analysis and decisionmaking (sic.)
9. Integrity and responsible institutional citizenship

Next, the AQIP's Categories are used by an institution to analyze and improve all of its essential systems. Each Category contains questions that are used to set up Action Projects by the institution for areas of improvement. The questions are divided into four types: a) context, b) processes, c) results, and d) improvement (AQIP, 2007). The AQIP's Categories include (2007):

Category 1: Helping Students Learn

Category 2: Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives

Category 3: Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs

Category 4: Valuing People

Category 5: Leading and Communicating

Category 6: Supporting Institutional Operations

Category 7: Measuring Effectiveness

Category 8: Planning Continuous Improvement

Category 9: Building Collaborative Relationships

Institutions use Action Projects as a way to remain committed to continuous improvement. Action Projects are stored in a web-based database by the AQIP and contain information about current and completed projects (AQIP, 2007). Institutions typically focus on three to four Action Projects at a time, and can begin and end a project at their own will. A suggestion of the AQIP is that one Action Project focuses on Category One: Helping Students Learn. AQIP defines the category as follows:

Category 1, Helping Students Learn, identifies the shared purpose of all higher education organizations. The pivot of any institutional analysis, this Category focuses on the teaching-learning process within a formal instructional context yet also addresses how your entire institution contributes to helping students learn and overall student development. The Category asks you to measure and analyze the performance of these key processes, and to describe what actions you take to continuously improve teaching and learning.(2007)

In 2008, the University of Wisconsin – Stout has four current Action Projects and five retired Action Projects (UW-Stout, 2009):

Current Action Projects

1. Campus Climate/Culture: Improve the Effectiveness of Internal Communication
2. Prepare Students for a Global Society and Workforce
3. Reach new markets and provide new programs through online learning, hybrid courses and programs, and partnerships

#### 4. Polytechnic Initiative

##### Retired Action Projects

1. Improving graduate education at UW-Stout
2. Leadership development at UW-Stout
3. Assessment of Student Learning and e-Scholar program at UW-Stout
4. First Year Experience
5. Expanding and updating academic program array

##### *Graduate Faculty Advisors*

The University of Wisconsin – Stout employs graduate faculty, in the four colleges and the School of Education, that are required to teach, serve, and conduct research (UW-Stout, 2004). An additional duty of the graduate faculty is to advise students, specifically during the student's required research. In other words, graduate faculty are required to take on the role of advisor. Research advisors are assigned the following expectations:

1. Must exert effort to establish a climate of mutual respect and reciprocal communication.
2. Must have a meeting with the student to approve the design of the study and the paper prior to its initiation, and to discuss advisement expectations of the student.
3. Must complete the appropriate certification process which relates to the use of human subjects in research. (REV 9/01)
4. Must be reasonably available for consultation in accordance with the agreed upon time frame. Note: the Graduate Student Council recommends the equivalent of one scheduled hour per week.

5. Must provide written feedback to students on drafts of the paper in accordance with the agreed upon time frame.
6. Must provide assistance with data analysis, or direction to knowledgeable sources, and should provide suggestions on how the results can be used in framing conclusions.
7. Must assist with the integration of the findings with prior research.
8. Should guide in the technical writing of the paper.
9. Must review the paper before final submission for proper format.
10. Must read the finished paper, giving final approval by signing the cover sheet, and assigning a grade. (UW-Stout Graduate School, 2009)

An advisor is “a teacher responsible for advising students on academic matters (The Random House College Dictionary, 1988, p. 21).” As simple as this sounds, advising can be a complicated job interwoven in psychology, adult education, the topic being advised, and in the case of the University of Wisconsin - Stout faculty advisors, knowledge of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition*.

Most graduate faculty have been trained in their respective field, but often faculty have not been trained in the realm of what is actually expected of graduate faculty. “While the world of academe has changed dramatically over the last two decades, most graduate programs that prepare new faculty for their first academic positions have not (Adams, 2002, p. 1).” In 1993 a program called Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) was started as a way “to develop new models of doctoral preparation for a faculty career by including preparation for teaching and academic citizenship as well as for research (DeNeef, 2002, p. V).” The PFF program relies strongly on mentors and to prepare students for real-life duties and tasks of



graduate faculty. In a 2001 survey of PFF students that had graduated and found jobs in academia, all believed that the PFF program “smoothed the transition between graduate school and their initial academic positions (DeNeef, 2002, p. 19).” The PFF program is designed to occur while students are completing their masters or doctorate programs, thus, is not applicable to teaching current graduate faculty at the University of Wisconsin – Stout. However, the PFF program does provide insight into the role of mentors.

### *Summary*

Successful organizations use continuous improvement to lead the way to quality. The University of Wisconsin – Stout has adapted the Academic Quality Improvement Program as a commitment to the university's continuous improvement plan that began in 1996 (UW-Stout, 2007b). In the Spring of 2009, a graduate advisor questioned the need for faculty advisor training, standards, and materials. At the same time, the Graduate School, in their own continuous improvement process, was developing a research advisor handbook. Using the model, “The Training Curriculum Model – Fitting the Pieces Together to Build a Strong Organization (see Figure 1.),” the researcher concluded that the place to start was with evaluation to find if changes were needed to improve the organization's foundation. The data collected from the study should determine if additional training or process improvement is needed for advisors.

### Chapter III: Methodology

In 2002, the University of Wisconsin – Stout joined the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) as a commitment to the university's continuous improvement plan that began in 1996 (UW-Stout, 2007b). In a continuous improvement plan, all areas of the organization are included as part of the system of improvement. This paper focuses on the graduate faculty in their role of advising students during the student's research paper. While graduate faculty have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to teach the subjects of their field, graduate faculty may lack training in areas such as advising. A survey of graduate faculty will determine if continuous improvement initiatives will help the faculty to advise students in the integral relationship that is needed for success. The survey will also reveal if other university processes could be improved in the area of graduate advisor. If so, improving the integral relationship between advisor and advisee will improve operational efficiency.

#### *Subject Selection and Description*

The population to be surveyed will be the 183 graduate faculty listed on the Graduate School's 2009 website as approved advisors for graduate student research projects. The website actually lists 184, but one faculty member contacted the researcher to indicate they have retired and are not interested in taking part in the survey.

#### *Instrumentation*

A survey was created that was based on the AQIP category: Helping Students Learn (Appendix B). The questions were divided into the four AQIP principles: Context, Processes, Results, and Improvements (AQIP, 2005). An additional section was added by the researcher titled: Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities. The survey had a total of 21 questions formatted with a 5-point Likert Scale to find the attitudes and opinions of the graduate faculty advisors

towards continuous improvement of the advisor role. The survey was set-up using the SelectSurvey tool, a web survey tool available through the University of Wisconsin – Stout. The survey was confidential and voluntary on the part of the participants and was approved by the University of Wisconsin – Stout Human Subjects and Institutional Review Board (Appendix B).

#### *Data Collection Procedures*

The data process occurred as follows:

1. A pre-survey electronic communication (e-mail) was sent to each faculty member, two days prior to the survey being administered, to aid in a higher return rate (Appendix C).
2. A survey e-mail was sent to each faculty member with a link to the 21 question survey, administered through the SelectSurvey tool (Appendix D). The e-mail included a link to decline participation.
3. A reminder e-mail was sent to each faculty member two days after the survey e-mail, to remind faculty to participate in the survey and to thank them for their participation (Appendix E). A deadline was included in the e-mail to indicate the survey would be closed seven days from the administered survey.
4. The SelectSurvey tool stored the collected data and the researcher exported the results into a spreadsheet to be used for data analysis.

#### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis was used to determine if training or processes improvement could be used in continuous improvement of the graduate advisor role. A decision table was created prior to data collection to be used to interpret the data (Appendix A). The questions were set-

up using a Likert Scale. The scale was rated 1 through 5, with 1 being Strongly Disagree, 2 being Disagree, 3 being Undecided, 4 being Agree, and 5 being Strongly Agree. Using the spreadsheet program with the collected data, the mean and standard deviation were calculated for each of the 21 questions. The mean and the standard deviation were compared to the decision table to determine whether action or no action was necessary for the particular question. Questions that fell into the questionable range of the decision table were left to interpretation by the researcher.

### *Limitations*

Collection of data through an on-line survey allows for a quick and inexpensive collection procedure. However, surveys are limited to the questions worded by the researcher and the interpretation by the population surveyed.

The limitations of the methodology were the following:

1. The survey did not include any demographic questions, such as how long the faculty member has been an advisor.
2. The survey did not include any open answer questions to allow for opinion or clarification.
3. All 183 graduate faculty approved for advising were surveyed, but not all 183 are current advisors or have not had the chance to advise a student at this date.
4. The data collection was limited to one week, and only one reminder e-mail was distributed to increase the response rate.
5. The data analysis was limited by the researcher's experience with data analysis and interpretation of decision tables.

## Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this study was to collect and analyze data using Category 1, Helping Students Learn, as defined by AQIP, from the graduate faculty at the University of Wisconsin – Stout. The goal was to determine if changes were needed, such as training or improving of processes, in the graduate faculty advisor role in order to strengthen the University of Wisconsin – Stout's foundation.

The 183 approved graduate advisors at the University of Wisconsin - Stout were surveyed through an on-line survey, consisting of 21 questions. A Likert Scale was used to collect quantitative data. The scale was rated 1 through 5, with 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree. The data was exported into a computer spreadsheet program and the mean and standard deviation were calculated for each question. A decision table was used to determine the need for action per question.

The questions were created using the AQIP guidelines (AQIP 2005) for Category 1. AQIP defines the category as “the teaching-learning process within a formal instructional context yet also addresses how your entire institution contributes to helping students learn and overall student development” (2007). The survey was divided into five categories: Context; Processes; Results; Improvement; and Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities. The survey was distributed on April 22, 2009 and closed on April 29, 2009. Of the 183 advisors surveyed, 56 responded to at least one question providing a response rate of 31%. This chapter discusses the results of the survey.

### *Context*

The Context questions focused on the attitudes of graduate faculty towards the general context of graduate student research papers. The results of the Context questions

showed that the graduate faculty thought the general context of graduate student research papers were in order. For example, the mean response was 4.02 for Q1., “The expectations of students working on their research paper align with the University's mission.” A score of 4 means the participant agrees with the statement, thus, the mean response was in agreement with Q1 and no action was needed.

*Table 1. Context*

Context:	Mean	STDEV	Rating	Decision
Q1. The expectations of students working on their research paper align with the University's mission.	4.02	0.9	High	No Action Needed
Q2. I feel that the research paper is a key instructional course in a graduate student's program.	4.14	1.05	Med	Questionable
Q3. The students I advise demonstrate through their research paper that they are prepared to work in a diverse world.	3.48	1.01	Med	Questionable

The AQIP Principles focus on mission of a university as a top priority to succeed as a “quality-driven” (AQIP, 2005) organization. While Q2. And Q3 fall into the decision that make them questionable, their means are still fairly high. The University of Wisconsin – Stout currently has an Action Plan open titled, “Prepare Students for a Global Society and Workforce.” Therefore, the results for Context show there are no actions needed to be taken for training or other processes for the general context of student research papers.

### *Processes*

The Processes category focused on all of the processes in place by the university in establishing, delivering and maintaining courses. The focus of Q4. and Q5. was on the continuous improvement of course objectives for the graduate research paper. The focus of

Q6. was on the individual department's process for matching students with advisors. The focus of Q7. was on the university's ability to address students that aren't prepared for their graduate paper, and the focus of Q8. was on the graduate faculty's own processes to assess student progress on their research paper.

The data analysis for the questions in this category showed a drop in the mean scores, as compared to the Context questions. Analysis on the decision table showed that Q4., Q5., and Q6. all fell into questionable decision, and action was recommended for Q7. Only Q8 had a decision that required no action.

*Table 2. Processes*

Processes	Mean	STDEV	Rating	Decision
Q4. The course objectives for a graduate student's research paper are reviewed periodically to ensure they are up-to-date and effective.	3.56	1.06	Med	Questionable
Q5. The communications to a student about the objectives and expectations of their research paper BEFORE the student begins their research paper are adequate.	3.48	1.11	Med	Questionable
Q6. My department has a process to help students find a research advisor that matches the student's needs, interests, and abilities.	3.02	1.27	Med	Questionable
Q7. The University has the tools needed to address students that are not prepared for their research paper, such as departments or programs that can address the student's needs.	2.93	1.16	Low	Action Recommended
Q8. I have processes in place to assess a student's progress on their research paper.	3.85	0.86	High	No Action Needed

The results of the Processes questions show there may be a need for continuous improvement in the university's processes for establishing, delivering and maintaining

courses. The individual processes by graduate faculty require no action, including no training.

### *Results*

The Results category focused on the results of learning objectives, what a student learns, and how the university compares with other universities. The data analysis showed Q9. And Q11. both as questionable and Q10. as requiring action. With low means, this area should be an area to concentrate on for continuous improvement.

*Table 3. Results*

Results	Mean	STDEV	Rating	Decision
Q9. A student's completed research paper is evidence that a student has the knowledge and skills required for awarding a degree/certificate.	3.65	1.23	Med	Questionable
Q10. My department collectively analyzes student research papers to a set standard.	1.98	0.94	Low	Action Recommended
Q11. Research papers of UW-Stout students are comparable to other University of Wisconsin graduate programs.	3.28	1.02	Med	Questionable

### *Improvement*

The Improvement category focuses on the university's continuous improvement of the processes and systems. Q12., Q13., and Q14. Focused on the attitudes of the graduate faculty towards the processes in place for the teaching-learning during the graduate student research. Q12. And Q13. both fell into questionable decision, and Q14. fell into action recommended. Q13. focused on the culture of the University of Wisconsin – Stout towards continuous improvement. The University of Wisconsin – Stout began a continuous improvement initiative by joining AQIP in 2002 (UW-Stout, 2007b), and an organizational culture takes



time to change. Therefore, Q13. is not a concern to the researcher. However, the other questions in the Improvement category show a need to be acted on in order to improve the teaching-learning process.

*Table 4. Improvement*

Improvement	Mean	STDEV	Rating	Decision
Q12. I think improvements to the advisor role could improve the teaching-learning process for student development.	3.6	1.11	Med	Questionable
Q13. I feel the culture at the University supports continuous improvement in the teaching-learning process.	3.73	1.14	Med	Questionable
Q14. My department has regular communications for improvements in the research paper coursework.	2.22	0.99	Low	Action Recommended

#### *Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities*

The last category, Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities, was added by the researcher and was not included in AQIP. The researcher was originally contacted to see if training was needed by research advisors. The researcher found that the Graduate School at the University of Wisconsin – Stout was already in the process of creating a research advisor handbook, thus, the focus of this research was on continuous improvement and not a needs assessment for training. The Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs) category was added to find the attitudes of the graduate faculty towards their own KSAs as a graduate advisor.

The data analysis of this category showed that the KSAs of the graduate faculty were higher than expected. The research was focusing on the premise that most graduate faculty are trained to teach in their subject matter expertise, but lack skills needed for other job requirements such as the task of advising students (Adams, 2002). Also, with the request to

look at the graduate research advisor training the assumption of the study was the scores of the Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities category would be low.

The questions Q15. - Q18. Focused on the comfort level of the graduate faculty in their role as advisor and the tasks required of them. While Q15. and Q17. were questionable, Q16. and Q18. required no action. Q15. focused on the knowledge of what is expected of a research advisor, and while it fell into questionable, 41 of the 53 respondents indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with this question (Figure 3.). Therefore, Q15 is not a concern for the researcher. Q17. focused on the need for a research advisor handbook. Of the 53 respondents, 18 indicated that they strongly disagreed, disagreed, or were undecided about a graduate advisor handbook (Figure 4.). Q17. could be focused on in the future, to see if in fact advisor training is needed and what is needed in an advisor handbook.

The questions Q19. - Q21. focused on mentoring and training. Q19. stated, "My advising skills would benefit from a mentor program," and fell into the action recommended decision. Of the 53 respondents to the questions, 35 indicated that they were undecided, agreed, or strongly agreed to this question (Figure 5.). Q20. asked if the graduate faculty member would be a mentor to other faculty, and the data indicated that 31 of the 53 respondents would be willing to mentor other faculty (Figure 6.) The last question, Q21., stated, "I would attend a training class for faculty advisors," and fell into the questionable category. Therefore, the data analysis of Q19. - Q21. indicates that training for faculty for the graduate research advisor role is not a strong concern. However, the role of mentor could be a continuous improvement initiative that could improve the teaching-learning strategies that are emphasized by AQIP.

Table 5. Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities	Mean	STDEV	Rating	Decision
Q15. I know what is expected of me as a research advisor at the University of Wisconsin – Stout.	3.91	1.02	Med	Questionable
Q16. I am comfortable in my role as a research advisor.	4.15	0.91	High	No Action Needed
Q17. A research advisor handbook would be sufficient for guidance in my role as an advisor.	3.56	1.06	Med	Questionable
Q18. I am able to guide a student in the technical writing of their paper using the American Psychological Association (APA) format.	4.28	0.97	High	No Action Needed
Q19. My advising skills would benefit from a mentor program.	2.98	1.03	Low	Action Recommended
Q20. I would be willing to be a mentor to other faculty advisors.	3.47	0.99	High	No Action Needed
Q21. I would attend a training class for faculty advisors.	3.38	1.06	Med	Questionable

Figure 2. I know what is expected of me as a research advisor at the University of Wisconsin – Stout.

<b>15.</b> I know what is expected of me as a research advisor at the University of Wisconsin - Stout.						
	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Select one.	0% (0)	17% (9)	6% (3)	47% (25)	30% (16)	<b>53</b>
				<b>Total Respondents</b>		<b>53</b>
				(skipped this question)		<b>3</b>

Figure 3. A research advisor handbook would be sufficient for guidance in my role as an advisor.

<b>17.</b> A research advisor handbook would be sufficient for guidance in my role as an advisor.						
	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Select one.	2% (1)	21% (11)	12% (6)	50% (26)	15% (8)	52
<b>Total Respondents</b>						52
(skipped this question)						4

Figure 4. My advising skills would benefit from a mentor program.

<b>19.</b> My advising skills would benefit from a mentor program.						
	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Select one.	8% (4)	26% (14)	30% (16)	32% (17)	4% (2)	53
<b>Total Respondents</b>						53
(skipped this question)						3

Figure 5. I would be willing to be a mentor to other faculty advisors.

<b>20.</b> I would be willing to be a mentor to other faculty advisors.						
	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Select one.	2% (1)	19% (10)	21% (11)	47% (25)	11% (6)	53
<b>Total Respondents</b>						53
(skipped this question)						3

## Chapter V: Discussion

In 2002, the University of Wisconsin – Stout joined the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) as a commitment to the university's continuous improvement plan that began in 1996 (UW-Stout, 2007b). In a continuous improvement plan, all areas of the organization are included as part of the system of improvement. This paper focused on the graduate faculty in their role of advising students during the student's research paper. The assumption of the research was that graduate faculty have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to teach the subjects of their field, but graduate faculty may lack training in areas such as advising. A 21 question on-line survey of the graduate faculty approved as research advisors through the Graduate School at the University of Wisconsin – Stout, revealed that some of the teaching-learning processes could benefit from continuous improvement initiatives to help the faculty advise students in the integral relationship that is needed for success. The survey also revealed that training graduate research advisors was not a strong concern for continuous improvement at this time.

### *Limitations*

The following were limitations to the study:

1. The researcher's knowledge of AQIP and continuous improvement is limited to less than two years of graduate coursework.
2. The researcher's knowledge of terminology used by faculty at the University of Wisconsin – Stout.
3. The researcher's knowledge of the Graduate School.
4. The Graduate School plays a significant role in administration, however the Graduate School staff will not be surveyed.

5. Graduate students play a significant role in the advisor/advisee relationship, but will not be surveyed.
6. The survey did not include any demographic questions, such as how long the faculty member has been an advisor.
7. The survey did not include any open answer questions to allow for opinion or clarification.
8. All 183 graduate faculty approved for advising were surveyed, but not all 183 are current advisors or have not had the chance to advise a student at this date.
9. The data collection was limited to one week, and only one reminder e-mail was distributed to increase the response rate.
10. The data analysis was limited by the researcher's experience with data analysis and interpretation of decision tables.

### *Conclusions*

Training and development specialists are often asked to create training to improve processes. However, training and development specialists know that training isn't always the answer. In the case of graduate research advisors at the University of Wisconsin – Stout, the researcher focused on the evaluation of the graduate advisor role using the Training Curriculum Model – Fitting the Pieces Together to Build a Strong Organization (Figure 1). Through an evaluation process, research can determine if changes are needed, which is also continuous improvement.

The research was conducted with the assumption that graduate faculty may lack the KSAs needed for being advisors and could use training to improve their role as faculty advisors. The research focused on process improvement of the graduate research paper

process and the KSAs of graduate faculty. The data collected and analyzed revealed that the KSAs of the graduate faculty was higher than expected, but that a mentor process could be a continuous improvement initiative to help improve the AQIP Category 1, Helping Students Learn. The data also revealed that the processes in place for the graduate research paper could be improved.

A program developed in 1993 called Preparing Future Faculty, came about to help universities prepare doctorate students for all of the duties and tasks required of faculty beyond their subject matter expertise. The Preparing Future Faculty (PPF) program found that mentors were of great value in easing the transition into academic positions (DeNeef, 2002). It is not known if any of the graduate faculty have graduated from a school that used the PPF program, however, the data collected from this study indicated that a mentor program at the University of Wisconsin – Stout could enhance the teaching-learning process. Of the 53 respondents to the survey, 35 graduate faculty members indicated that they were undecided or agreed that a mentor program could help in their advisor role. The data analysis also indicated that action should be taken for Q.19, “My advising skills would benefit from a mentor program” (Table 5.). The results match those found by PPF.

The data analysis of the question types: Context, Processes, Results, and Improvement that follow the AQIP Category 1, Helping Students Learn, revealed only a few processes that required action. The questions that required action were the following:

Processes:

Q7. The University has the tools needed to address students that are not prepared for their research paper, such as departments or programs that can address the student's needs.

#### Results:

Q10. My department collectively analyzes student research papers to a set standard.

#### Improvement:

Q14. My department has regular communications for improvements in the research paper coursework.

As shown in the literature review, continuous improvement when used with AQIP, is a way for an organization to analyze and improve essential systems. A review of the survey questions that required action revealed that a three university processes could be improved in order to enhance the graduate research advisor process. However, a continuous improvement study should be careful to follow the Curriculum Model shown in Figure 1. to ask the question, “Are Changes Needed?” to improve the business foundation. In the case of Q7., Q10. and Q14. the researcher believes that continuous improvement initiatives could benefit the University of Wisconsin – Stout's foundation.

#### *Recommendations*

A continuous improvement process is a way for an organization to analyze and improve essential systems. The graduate research advisor role at the University of Wisconsin – Stout is an integral role in the teaching-learning process for graduate students. The research conducted through the 21 question survey of graduate faculty at the University of Wisconsin – Stout revealed that a few areas could use continuous improvement in order to enhance the graduate advisor role. While this paper only focused on graduate advisors, to be complete in studying continuous improvement of the graduate advisor role, the researcher recommends that the graduate students and the Graduate School are surveyed. In conclusions for this



paper, the researcher recommends that the following processes be focused on for improving at the University of Wisconsin – Stout:

Context:

1. No action required.

Processes:

1. Review objectives of the graduate research paper on a regular basis in order to ensure they are up-to-date and effective.
2. Review the communications to students that happen before a student begins research to enhance the student development.
3. Review the process for matching a student with an advisor.
4. Take action on the University's tools in place for helping students that aren't prepared.

Results:

1. Review objectives of the graduate research paper to ensure a student's paper meets the objectives.
2. Take action on department processes to set standards for graduate research papers.
3. Review process for comparing graduate student research with that of graduate students at other universities.

Improvement:

1. Take action on department processes for continuous improvement of the graduate advisor/graduate research paper process

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities:

1. Review and possibly establish a mentor program for graduate research advisors.

2. Review the attitudes and KSAs of graduate advisors to determine what is needed in a research advisor handbook and if training is needed in addition to a handbook.

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## Appendix A: Decision Table

<b>Decision Table for Data Analysis</b>			
<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Decision</b>
3.0 – 5	< 1.0	High	Acceptable (No Action Needed)
3.0 – 5	> 1.0	Med	Questionable
1 – 2.99	Any	Low	Actions or Training Recommended

**Continuous Improvement/Graduate Research Advisors**

Page 1 of 5

**Context**

DIRECTIONS: Use your experience as a graduate faculty research advisor to answer the following questions. Select one response per question that best represents your feelings.

NOTE: The term "research paper" used in the survey refers to the research course options: Plan A and Plan B.

*This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal regulations Title 45 Part 46.*

1. The expectations of students working on their research paper align with the University's mission.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Select one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. I feel that the research paper is a key instructional course in a graduate student's program.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Select one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. The students I advise demonstrate through their research paper that they are prepared to work in a diverse world.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Select one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Next****Cancel**



## Continuous Improvement/Graduate Research Advisors

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### Processes

DIRECTIONS: Use your experience as a graduate faculty research advisor to answer the following questions. Select one response per question that best represents your feelings.

*This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal regulations Title 45 Part 46.*

4. The course objectives for a graduate student's research paper are reviewed periodically to ensure they are up-to-date and effective.

Select one.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. The communications to a student about the objectives and expectations of their research paper BEFORE the student begins their research paper are adequate.

Select one.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. I help students find a research advisor that matches the student's needs, interests, and abilities.

Select one.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. The University has the tools needed to address students that are not prepared for their research paper, such as departments or programs that can address the student's needs.

Select one.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. I have processes in place to assess a student's progress on their research paper.

Select one.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Back

Next

Cancel

**Continuous Improvement/Graduate Research Advisors**

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**Results**

DIRECTIONS: Use your experience as a graduate faculty research advisor to answer the following questions. Select one response per question that best represents your feelings.

*This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal regulations Title 45 Part 46.*

9. A student's completed research paper is evidence that a student has the knowledge and skills required for awarding a degree/certificate.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Select one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. My department collectively analyzes student research papers to a set standard.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Select one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Research papers of UW-Stout students are comparable to other University of Wisconsin graduate programs.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Select one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Back****Next****Cancel**

**Continuous Improvement/Graduate Research Advisors**

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**Improvement**

DIRECTIONS: Use your experience as a graduate faculty research advisor to answer the following questions. Select one response per question that best represents your feelings.

*This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal regulations Title 45 Part 46.*

12. I think improvements to the advisor role could improve the teaching-learning process for student development.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Select one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. I feel the culture at the University supports continuous improvement in the teaching-learning process.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Select one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. My department has regular communications for improvements in the research paper coursework.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Select one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Back****Next****Cancel**

## Continuous Improvement/Graduate Research Advisors

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### Knowledge, Skills and Abilities

DIRECTIONS: Use your experience as a graduate faculty research advisor to answer the following questions. Select one response per question that best represents your feelings.

*This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal regulations Title 45 Part 46.*

15. I know what is expected of me as a research advisor at the University of Wisconsin - Stout.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Select one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. I am comfortable in my role as a research advisor.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Select one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. A research advisor handbook would be sufficient for guidance in my role as an advisor.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Select one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. I understand the American Psychological Association (APA) format.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Select one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

19. My advising skills would benefit from a mentor program.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Select one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20. I would be willing to be a mentor to other faculty advisors.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Select one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

21. I would attend a training class for faculty advisors.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Select one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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## Appendix C: Pre-Survey E-mail

April 20, 2009

Dear Graduate Faculty:

I am a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin – Stout, and I am conducting a study using the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) to study continuous improvement initiatives and training. Specifically, I am studying continuous improvement on the role of the graduate advisor and if additional knowledge, skills, and/or abilities may be needed. Your expertise as an advisor to graduate students working on their field project is critical in determining how Stout handles the AQIP Category – Helping Students Learn.

This message is intended to notify you about a survey I will be conducting to collect data for my study. The survey will arrive to you by email on Wednesday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>. It is a web survey and should take about 15 minutes to complete. Your responses to the survey are confidential and will be used only for data collection. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you and, once the survey has begun, you may choose not to answer any questions on the survey.

I appreciate your time and help with my data collection. Thank you for your commitment to continuous improvement at UW - Stout!

Sincerely,

Kimberly LaPlante  
Graduate Student in the Training and Development Program  
University of Wisconsin – Stout

laplantek@uwstout.edu

**“This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal regulations Title 45 Part 46.”**

## Appendix D: Survey E-Mail

April 22, 2009

Dear Graduate Faculty:

Two days ago, you received notice of a survey I am conducting using the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) to study continuous improvement in the graduate advisor role. Your expertise as an advisor to graduate students working on their research paper is important in determining how Stout handles the AQIP principle – Helping Students Learn.

Your responses to the survey are confidential and will be used only for data collection. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you and, once the survey has begun, you may choose not to answer any questions on the survey. By completing the following survey you agree to participate in the field problem entitled, *“A Focus on Continuous Improvement of Thesis Advisors at the University of Wisconsin – Stout.”*

The link to the survey is: <http://www2.uwstout.edu/GeneralSurveys/TakeSurvey.asp?SurveyID=7J1373639782I2>

If you do not wish to respond to this survey, please click on the link below to decline:  
<http://www2.uwstout.edu/GeneralSurveys/DeclineSurvey.asp?EID=52MB6m61Bm30B46502mB056B2J3IBKJ3>

I appreciate your time and help with my data collection. Thank you for your commitment to continuous improvement at UW - Stout!

Sincerely,

Kimberly LaPlante  
Graduate Student in the Training and Development Program  
University of Wisconsin – Stout

[laplantek@uwstout.edu](mailto:laplantek@uwstout.edu)

## Appendix E: Follow-up E-mail

April 24, 2009

Dear Graduate Faculty:

Two days ago, you received a link for a survey I am conducting to study the principles of the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) on the continuous improvement of the role of the graduate advisor. If you have completed the survey, thank you for your time and help in my data collection. If you have not completed the survey, please consider completing the survey soon, as it will be closed on April 29, 2009.

Your responses to the survey are confidential and will be used only for data collection. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

Thank you for your commitment to continuous improvement at UW - Stout!

Sincerely,

Kimberly LaPlante  
Graduate Student in the Training and Development Program  
University of Wisconsin – Stout

laplantek@uwstout.edu

## Appendix F: Survey Results

1. The expectations of students working on their research paper align with the University's mission.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Response Total
Select one.	2% (1)	5% (3)	12% (7)	50% (28)	30% (17)	56
	Total Respondents					56

2. I feel that the research paper is a key instructional course in a graduate student's program.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Response Total
Select one.	4% (2)	7% (4)	5% (3)	39% (22)	45% (25)	56
	Total Respondents					56

3. The students I advise demonstrate through their research paper that they are prepared to work in a diverse world.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Response Total
Select one.	0% (0)	23% (13)	20% (11)	43% (24)	14% (8)	56
	Total Respondents					56

4. The course objectives for a graduate student's research paper are reviewed periodically to ensure they are up-to-date and effective.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Response Total
Select one.	4% (2)	13% (7)	26% (14)	39% (21)	19% (10)	54
	Total Respondents					54
	(skipped this question)					2

5. The communications to a student about the objectives and expectations of their research paper BEFORE the student begins their research paper are adequate.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Response Total
Select one.	4% (2)	17% (9)	17% (9)	46% (25)	17% (9)	54
	Total Respondents					54
	(skipped this question)					2

6. My department has a process to help students find a research advisor that matches the student's needs, interests, and abilities.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Response Total
Select one.	15% (8)	26% (14)	9% (5)	43% (23)	7% (4)	54
	Total Respondents					54
	(skipped this question)					2



- 7.** The University has the tools needed to address students that are not prepared for their research paper, such as departments or programs that can address the student's needs.

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Select one.	11% (6)	30% (16)	22% (12)	30% (16)	7% (4)	54
	<b>Total Respondents</b>					54
	(skipped this question)					2

- 8.** I have processes in place to assess a student's progress on their research paper.

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Select one.	0% (0)	11% (6)	11% (6)	59% (32)	19% (10)	54
	<b>Total Respondents</b>					54
	(skipped this question)					2

- 9.** A student's completed research paper is evidence that a student has the knowledge and skills required for awarding a degree/certificate.

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Select one.	4% (2)	24% (13)	4% (2)	41% (22)	28% (15)	54
	<b>Total Respondents</b>					54
	(skipped this question)					2

- 10.** My department collectively analyzes student research papers to a set standard.

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Select one.	33% (18)	44% (24)	15% (8)	6% (3)	2% (1)	54
	<b>Total Respondents</b>					54
	(skipped this question)					2

- 11.** Research papers of UW-Stout students are comparable to other University of Wisconsin graduate programs.

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Select one.	7% (4)	9% (5)	41% (22)	33% (18)	9% (5)	54
	<b>Total Respondents</b>					54
	(skipped this question)					2

**12.** I think improvements to the advisor role could improve the teaching-learning process for student development.

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Select one.	2% (1)	12% (6)	19% (10)	44% (23)	23% (12)	52
	<b>Total Respondents</b>					52
	(skipped this question)					4

**13.** I feel the culture at the University supports continuous improvement in the teaching-learning process.

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Select one.	6% (3)	6% (3)	29% (15)	29% (15)	31% (16)	52
	<b>Total Respondents</b>					52
	(skipped this question)					4

**14.** My department has regular communications for improvements in the research paper coursework.

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Select one.	25% (13)	45% (23)	16% (8)	14% (7)	0% (0)	51
	<b>Total Respondents</b>					51
	(skipped this question)					5

**15.** I know what is expected of me as a research advisor at the University of Wisconsin - Stout.

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Select one.	0% (0)	17% (9)	6% (3)	47% (25)	30% (16)	53
	<b>Total Respondents</b>					53
	(skipped this question)					3

**16.** I am comfortable in my role as a research advisor.

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Select one.	0% (0)	8% (4)	11% (6)	40% (21)	42% (22)	53
	<b>Total Respondents</b>					53
	(skipped this question)					3

(skipped this question)

**17.** A research advisor handbook would be sufficient for guidance in my role as an advisor.

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Select one.	2% (1)	21% (11)	12% (6)	50% (26)	15% (8)	52
	<b>Total Respondents</b>					52
	(skipped this question)					4

**18.** I am able to guide a student in the technical writing of their paper using the American Psychological Association (APA) format.

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Select one.	4% (2)	4% (2)	2% (1)	42% (22)	49% (26)	53
	<b>Total Respondents</b>					53
	(skipped this question)					3

**19.** My advising skills would benefit from a mentor program.

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Select one.	8% (4)	26% (14)	30% (16)	32% (17)	4% (2)	53
	<b>Total Respondents</b>					53
	(skipped this question)					3

**20.** I would be willing to be a mentor to other faculty advisors.

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Select one.	2% (1)	19% (10)	21% (11)	47% (25)	11% (6)	53
	<b>Total Respondents</b>					53
	(skipped this question)					3

**21.** I would attend a training class for faculty advisors.

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
Select one.	8% (4)	11% (6)	26% (14)	45% (24)	9% (5)	53
	<b>Total Respondents</b>					53
	(skipped this question)					3